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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [TU](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: GREECE CLAIMS TURKEY DUMPED ILLEGAL ALIENS IN
GREEK WATERS

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Jeff Hovenier for reasons 1.4(b and d).

Summary

1. (C) Greece has demarched Turkey following news reports that the Greek Coast Guard filmed the Turkish Coast Guard dumping illegal aliens off a ship into Greek territorial waters in the Aegean Sea. A Greek MFA official told us that the evidence of the alien dumping is strong and that it is not the first such incident. An official at the Turkish Embassy disagreed with this, saying pictures of the incident are nearly unintelligible. While Turkey has apparently not yet made a formal response, the Turkish Embassy told us that the Turkish Coast Guard could issue a statement very soon. End Summary.

Controversy in the Aegean

2. (U) The Athens daily "Ethnos" broke the story September 3, publishing several photographs from a video the Greek Coast Guard allegedly shot August 19 off the island of Lesbos. According to the paper, the Greek Coast Guard has repeatedly observed the Turkish Coast Guard either depositing illegal aliens in Greek waters (as in this case) or transporting aliens toward Greek territory only to back off when spotted by the Greek Coast Guard. In follow-up articles the paper cited two other incidents, on September 2 and September 6, in which Turkish Coast Guard vessels were spotted allegedly towing boats full of aliens toward Greece and then turning back. Asked by reporters about the allegations, Greek Foreign Minister Bakoyannis said Greece had delivered a demarche to Turkey. The story took on the usual sensationalist tones in Greece, with "Ethnos" citing a "well-informed source" who claimed the Greek government had not responded to such incidents in the past, and had refrained both from making high-level complaints to Turkey and from passing the evidence on to EU bodies. Another Athens daily, "Eleftheros Typos," claimed -- without citing a source -- that Turkey's response to the Greek demarche was to reiterate its position that the eastern half of the Aegean (which includes Lesbos and many other Greek islands) is a Turkish sea.

3 (C) Pericles Boutos, a Greek MFA official responsible for Aegean issues, confirmed to us September 5 that the Greek Embassy in Ankara had delivered a demarche on the incident to the Turkish MFA. Boutos said the Greek footage clearly showed the Turkish Coast Guard dumping illegal aliens into Greek waters at night and throwing life vests to them. He said the Turkish MFA had not yet responded substantively to the demarche; thus far the Turks have said only that they will look into the matter, they will answer in due time, and they respect all relevant treaties. Boutos told us that there had been repeated incidents in which the Turkish Coast Guard escorted or tugged small boats loaded with aliens into Greek waters, and he said the Greek government protests such incidents whenever it sees them. Boutos said he did not know who the aliens in this incident were or what happened to

them, but he noted that the majority of illegal aliens come from Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) Turkish Embassy First Secretary Paris Kalkavan put a different spin on the incident in a conversation with us September 5. Kalkavan said the poor quality of the footage made it "impossible to see anything." He said it was his sense that the Greeks were aware of the weakness of their evidence, because Greek officials had carefully avoided references to the illegal aliens -- the essence of the controversy as far as the Greek press is concerned -- and instead on the alleged violation of Greek territorial waters. Kalkavan said the Turkish Coast Guard may put out a statement on the incident in the coming days.

SPECKHARD